

IMPROBABLE

GIRLS





AJ

1



Reed

2



anneArundel

3



Rae

4



Lance

5



Mars

6



chezforshire

7



Jesu

8

Fortune Favors The Us

by Jojo

"Well, well, well," said a voice from outside the cell's barred window. Vriska's head spun as if on a swivel, a shadow covering the little window's view into the moonlight outside. "In another predicament, are we, marquise?"

Vriska's hopeless scowl immediately turned into a wide, toothy grin.

"Took you long enough, Lalonde."

Vriska Serket was known better by another name: Marquise Spinneret Mindfang, dread Pirate of the Seven Seas. That was all a bit of a mouthful, though, so usually people settled for "Marquise." A life of crime such as hers ended in one place: The Marine Prison, a holding cell for the world's most exceptional and deadly wanted men and women. Luckily for Vriska, however, she wasn't destined to stay for long, thanks to the interloper peeking in her cell window.

A detail of note- The appearance of a woman peeking her head in a window should have been rather odd for a prison such as this, for Vriska's cell was nearly six-hundred feet in the air.

"Yes, well, forgive me," drawled Rose Lalonde, "There are a great many cells at this fine facility, so finding you wasn't easy."

The reason Rose was able to peek in a window like she was, so high up, was not due to some climbing prowess, but to the fact that a handy flying broomstick was seated under herself, one which she leant on to peer inside at Vriska.

"Well hurry up and bust me out!" Vriska said, standing back from the wall. To her dismay, the wall didn't blast loose nor did it dissolve into nothing by way of one of Rose's magical incantations. Instead, she got an eyeful of Rose Lalonde's smuggest, most self-assured smile.

"I'm not sure, Vriska," she mused, inspecting her nails coyly. "I've heard that your crimes are both terrifying and myriad. Why should I allow you leave of a place you might deserve to belong?"

Vriska's teeth gritted. She grabbed the window's bars, glaring at Rose, pressing her face as close as she could out the side.

"You little shit. You'd really leave me here to rot?" She snarled at the witch, who slid a little further away from Vriska's window on her broom.

"Perhaps," Rose said, faux-thoughtfully. She withdrew her wand from a pocket in her robes. She lazily waved it in the air, producing a lovely glass of orange juice. Vriska's eyes flicked to the sweet drink- All she'd had during her week-long stay at the Marine Prison was salty water and crusts. Rose gulped the juice down, tossing the glass down towards the sea below.

"You little-" Vriska snarled, howling now, reaching her arms out to try to fruitlessly grab Rose and wring her neck for her teasing display. Rose glid closer and pressed a finger to Vriska's lips.

"Don't be nearly so rowdy, Vriska," she chided, peeking inside Vriska's cell. "You wouldn't want to alert the guards, would you?"

To this, Vriska fell sullenly silent, crossing her arms. She stepped back from the wall again, but Rose reached through the bars, tugging her shoulder.

"Hey," Rose said, her plush lips in an alluring pout. "Didn't you miss me?"

Rose's face was pressed to the bars, now, and Vriska knew what she wanted. Vriska, rolling her eyes despite her cheeks flushinmg, pressed a kiss to Rose's lips through her cell, breathing into it. To Vriska, it was far sweeter and more tart than the contents of the juice Rose teased her with. It was heaven in hell. The feeling of bars on their faces fell away as the kiss deepened. It would have continued had a voice not spoken from behind them.

"Hey! It's a witch!"

In their passion, Vriska and Rose had failed to notice the guard opening Vriska's cell door, no doubt alerted by Vriska's caterwauling.

"Oop- Time to go." Rose said, hastily withdrawing her wand, pointing it at the brick wall between them. With a resounding crack, the wall blew away, spraying the inside of the cell with debris- Cracked bricks and bars flew every which way, catching the guard

on the back foot, hastily covering his eyes. Vriska, who had prepared for this, cackled as she leapt through the new hole in the wall, feeling the weight leave her body. She was like a bird from a cage, the guard helpless to catch her.

"Au revoir, douchebags!" Vriska cried, waving playfully to the dumbfounded guard as Rose caught her wife deftly, flying them both through the night.

After a long flight through the clouds, Rose deposited them both softly on the ground, among some trees. As soon as their feet made contact with the forest floor, they sprang into an embrace. Vriska's haughtiness and Rose's playfulness were both gone.

"I missed you," Vriska said simply, reiterating her sentiment from the cell into Rose's soft shoulder.

"I missed you, too, darling," Rose replied into Vriska's bony one.

They held the hug tight, for they knew what must come next, and neither wanted to face it. They pulled back; Rose held Vriska's waist, Vriska held Rose's shoulders, lavender eyes meeting deep, deep blue.

"I suppose this is goodbye," Vriska said slowly, the words causing her pain.

"Must it be?" Rose implored, her hands tightening on her lover's sides. Vriska smiled a sad smile. Rose hated it. Vriska lied and cheated, but always with such a gleeful grin, never did she lie to herself, nor smile so sadly.

"Not forever, kitten," Vriska said, kissing her wife's cheek. "Just until I manage to shake the law. I already got you in enough trouble busting me out of prison. If they see you with me, it'll be a noose 'round both our necks."

Rose re-applied the hug, wrapping arms around the Marquise once again. Nothing more needed to be said. When they pulled apart, Vriska shrugged off her coat, giving it to Rose. She pressed it into Rose's arms in lieu of herself, their eyes meeting again.

"Keep this 'til I get back," she murmured. "And besides..."

Vriska tugged her sleeve up, showing Rose the light symbol tattoo underneath. Rose hastily did the same, sniffing just a little. They pressed their wrists together, and in unison, spoke.

"Fortune favors the us."

As Vriska dashed off, no doubt to lay low for a time that would make Rose's heart ache, Rose remained at that spot in the woods, clutching her wife's coat close, as though the scent it exuded would be enough to replace her.



Salt

14



Hal

15



Bea

16



springfia

17



hollyhock

18



Butler

19



Cookie

20



Hannah

21

Jane, Calliope and Roxy Know the Devil

by Eva/Dove

"Reach Heaven Through Violence."

Mathangi "Maya" Mantra (Murder the Gods and Topple their Thrones)

6PM

Jane was already drenched in bug spray, but the mosquitos always found a way to bite her.

ROXY: maybe its just ur royal blood!

ROXY: they cant ever get enough of that shit

JANE: Roxy please don't start with this royal blood stuff.

JANE: I am merely the heiress to a medium large baking company.

JANE: I am not a princess.

CALLIOPE: bUt what if yoU were though?

CALLIOPE: woUldn't it be so magical to be a princess?

CALLIOPE: i shoUld add yoU as a princess in my fics.

Jane was tired.

Tired of the bugs, tired of her cabinmates, tired of summer camp, tired of summer.

The whole thing was a advertising campaign so everyone would see what a nice christian girl the crockercorp heiress was, or at least how nice she was now after looking for "two girls kissing" on the internet.

How she blames herself for looking that up.

Actually how she blames herself for not being stealth enough when looking it up.

Calliope was always distracted with his diary.

Writing and drawing a bit of everything: his friends, his family and all the place he have been through, everything recorded through the filters of his imagination.,

Roxy was just happy to be there for his friends.

JANE: Please don't.
ROXY: oh can i be a cool wizard?
ROXY: and haha what if my character was a girl
ROXY: wouldn't that be fucked up
CALLIOPE: yoU can be a girl in my fics roxy!
ROXY: oh and what your character is?
CALLIOPE: excUse me?
ROXY: your character in your stories
ROXY: what are they about?
CALLIOPE: oh.
CALLIOPE: well i am not a character in my own stories.
CALLIOPE: it feels weird for myself to be a part of them.
ROXY: awwn
ROXY: i think you deserve to be a part of it.
ROXY: after you-
JANE: Can you boys please be silent?
JANE: We're almost at the bonfire already please pay respects.
JANE: We would be late if I weren't metaphorically dragging you here.
ROXY: sorry!
CALLIOPE: apologies.
BONFIRE CAPTAIN: Oh if it isn't group alpha.

The bonfire, the bonfire captain.

Being in the presence of the bonfire captain felt like you were being judged all the time, and Jane was very aware of such so she would always calculate her actions.

Calliope took a seat in the way most comfortable he could also work on his diary, it was amazing how well he could write even while walking.

Roxy took the worst stump, which was extremely unnecessary considering only the four of them were there, but he wanted to be sure the others got the good ones.

Jane took a seat like the proper lady she was, or at least the best she could seat like a proper lady on a stump.

JANE: I apologize if we're late captain.
BONFIRE CAPTAIN: You're just in time actually!
BONFIRE CAPTAIN: A punctuality I would only expect from the Crockercorp heiress.
BONFIRE CAPTAIN: Having too much trouble taking care of the boys there?
JANE: I wouldn't consider it like that captain.
BONFIRE CAPTAIN: Well sit down everyone I want to tell some things.
BONFIRE CAPTAIN: Is everyone having a good time?
JANE: Yes sir.

ROXY: yeah

CALLIOPE: mhm.

BONFIRE CAPTAIN: I said.

BONFIRE CAPTAIN: Is everyone having a Good Time!?

JANE: Yes sir!

ROXY: yeah!

CALLIOPE: ah! yes!

BONFIRE CAPTAIN: Good.

BONFIRE CAPTAIN: You know I wasn't really popular when I was a kid.

BONFIRE CAPTAIN: I only had two friends really.

BONFIRE CAPTAIN: People would ask which one was my *best* friend and I would always say both of them.

BONFIRE CAPTAIN: I liked them both and I didn't wanted to choose.

BONFIRE CAPTAIN: Truth be told one of them was really annoying actually.

BONFIRE CAPTAIN: I didn't wanted to say anything cause I didn't wanted to hurt his feelings.

BONFIRE CAPTAIN: But when the devil came for him I did not hesitate.

BONFIRE CAPTAIN: Remember kids.

BONFIRE CAPTAIN: Some friendships you can keep.

BONFIRE CAPTAIN: Some you leave to God.

Jane listened attentively and absorbed every word.

Roxy listened because he didn't wanted to make the captain mad at him.

Calliope was already distracted on his own world.

BONFIRE CAPTAIN: Say group alpha.

BONFIRE CAPTAIN: Feel like meeting the Devil tonight?

7PM

JANE: Where's roxy?

Calliope looks towards Jane and blinks.

CALLIOPE: i don't know.

JANE: *sigh*

JANE: Please don't tell Roxy just ran away while we were dropping our things in the cabin.

JANE: Did the devil already got him?

CALLIOPE: i don't think so.

CALLIOPE: i was distracted, bUt he looked awfUllY impatient aboUt something and he kept looking towards Us and the exit.

CALLIOPE: i assUme he wanted to leave when no one was looking.

JANE: And you didn't said anything?

JANE: Dear God you could had said something and asked what was wrong.

CALLIOPE: i thoUght aboUt doing so.

CALLIOPE: bUt i didn't wanted to get involved.

JANE: Dear you two would be dead if I wasn't here to supervise.

JANE: C'mon let's look for him!

The house felt like a labyrinth, the architecture was so confusing that Calliope deep down thought this was the house of leaves and that was the so called devil.

In the end it was just a regular house build in terrible, terrible fashion by someone who should not be making houses.

CALLIOPE: do yoU think the captain bUild this hoUse?

JANE: I want to assume that he would have made a better job.

CALLIOPE: yoU expect a awfUl lot from the captain.

JANE: Well there's a reason he is called the captain.

CALLIOPE: and what reason is that?

JANE: ...

JANE: Well I'm sure there's a reason.

CALLIOPE: see.

CALLIOPE: i don't Understand why yoU're so qUick to trUst aUthority figUres.

JANE: Because if we don't trust them it would be anarchy.

JANE: It's their job to keep things in order and I will follow them.

CALLIOPE: Until yoU become the aUthority figUre?

CALLIOPE: what will yoU do when yoU're the one in charge?

JANE: But I have a lot of plans for that mind you.

CALLIOPE: So you're going to lick the boot of authority for a clear path towards the very same highground.

JANE: ...

JANE: Precisely.

JANE: Calliope you're a smart boy.

JANE: What do *you* want?

CALLIOPE: i think i found roxy.

They were in the attic.

After traversing this cabin so much Calliope was almost sad to know that this wasn't a infinite house that was bigger on the inside, that unfortunately there was ever so much to explore in it.

Roxy was right in front of them.

Embraced to a bottle of alcohol.

Visibly drunk.

ROXY: i can expalin this

8PM

ROXY: its jsut its jsut
ROXY: everythign is so much all th time
ROXY: all the time everythime
ROXY: i just i jjsut need
ROXY: to rest
ROXY: for 1 sec
JANE: Roxy...
JANE: I was joking when I mentioned if the devil had already taken you, but I'm afraid I was right.
ROXY: i did NOT gave in to thr devil
ROXY: thats bs
ROXY: im still as holy as a boy can be
JANE: Just a little tainted by sin...
JANE: Can you walk?
ROXY: what the fuck question is can i walk of course i can walk i have been drinking not mortally wounded
ROXY: but can you hold me anyway
JANE: I can.
JANE: Calliope can you go on ahead?
JANE: We still need to unpack our things and I just want to talk a bit with Roxy.
CALLIOPE: i will.
JANE: Thank you.

As Calliope walks away, back to the maze that was this house, Roxy curls up and tries to make himself as small as possible

ROXY: im sorry
JANE: ...
ROXY: im really sorry ok
JANE: ...
ROXY: i already said im sorry please say something!
JANE: How-
JANE: How does it tastes like.
ROXY: im sorry?
JANE: How does alcohol tastes like.
ROXY: ...
ROXY: bad
JANE: C'mon it can't taste bad.
JANE: It makes no sense for it to taste bad else why would so many people enjoy it.

ROXY: people dont drink booze cause its good
ROXY: they drink booze cause it makes it easier to deal with all the bs of the world
ROXY: did you never had a taste of it?
JANE: Roxy I'm the heiress to a medium large, mostly large corporation.
JANE: If I am anything less than perfect that goes directly on the company's image.
JANE: And that goes to my parents.
JANE: And that goes back to me.
JANE: So I am always perfect.
ROXY: that sounds miserable
JANE: ...
JANE: It is.
JANE: Is-
JANE: Is there anything left?
ROXY: hm
ROXY: a bit
ROXY: but this stuff is strong
ROXY: and this is your first time drinking
JANE: Do not underestimate me Roxy.
ROXY: well janey here you go them

Jane looks at the bottle of cheap booze like an acolyte would look towards a vial of forbidden nectar.

She hates the fact the she has to be so perfect.

For once she wants to be bad.

Just once.

She deserves it.

She drinks it.

It's terrible.

She doesn't stop though.

She refuses to not drink everything in the bottle.

Roxy underestimated her and if she's going to be bad she's going to be very good at being bad.

Optimal badness.

High quality bad content.

Most good source of badness.

Fuck she was drunk.

ROXY: haha

ROXY: at least now theres something equal about us

Jane smiles.

JANE: Yeah.

9PM

CALLIOPE: and thUs the princess and the wizard live happily forever after.
CALLIOPE: that is Until i come back to these characters and pUt them throUgh more strife.

ROXY: hell yeas

Jane was a bit too tipsy and tired so she wanted to take a nap.

Calliope and Roxy were currently going through all the adventures Calliope had written on his diary.

ROXY: haha

ROXY: its just so funny

ROXY: idk

ROXY: is it weird to say that talking about my character as a girl makes me very happy?

CALLIOPE: i do kinda get that.

CALLIOPE: if i had a character i woUld probably make her a girl too.

ROXY: actually i really wanna know why you don't have a character of your own

ROXY: why do you write these amazing stories about others but never yourself

CALLIOPE: i jUst feel like.

CALLIOPE: *sigh* i jUst feel like i don't belong in these stories.

CALLIOPE: i merely feel like a mUse that inspires these tales.

CALLIOPE: not as an active participant at all.

ROXY: well i think the muse time is over

ROXY: and that the calliope that is starting riight now

CALLIOPE: haha please roxy.

CALLIOPE: don't be silly.

ROXY: well actually i think i'm gonna be as silly as i can

ROXY: cmon you said your character was gonna be a girl tell me more about her

CALLIOPE: well.

CALLIOPE: i think it makes sense for her to be a muse.

ROXY: ohhh that so fancy

ROXY: what her overall deal?

CALLIOPE: well she inspires others!

CALLIOPE: others err.

CALLIOPE: do things becaUse she inspired them!

ROXY: hm

ROXY: could you say she inspired this whole world?

ROXY: like some kind of goddess?

ROXY: since youre the one who wrote all that

CALLIOPE: oh goodness i woUldn't go so far!

CALLIOPE: she is a mUse alright bUt i'm not sUre if she woUld be so important?

CALLIOPE: a goddess yoU say?

CALLIOPE: roxy please that's blasphemy!

ROXY: awwn cmon callie

ROXY: i think you can be a bit important

ROXY: you deserve to be a bit a goddess

ROXY: you deserve just some blasphemy

CALLIOPE: ok ok.

CALLIOPE: maybe she's a bit important.

CALLIOPE: maybe perhaps she gets to be a bit of a goddess.

CALLIOPE: bUt jUst that.

CALLIOPE: why are yoU looking at me like that?

Oh and Roxy was absolutely looking towards Calliope "like that".

He had a devilish smile on his face and eyes looked like the ones of a very mischievous cat.

ROXY: what if our ocs kissed

CALLIOPE: well technically they're sonas actUally.

ROXY: youre avoiding the question callie

ROXY: what if we were both girls and we kissed

ROXY: flushed emoji

CALLIOPE: well that woUld be very flUshed emoji of Us!

CALLIOPE: i-

CALLIOPE: trUth be told i often image of myself as a girl.

CALLIOPE: bUt these are sinfUl thoUghts.

CALLIOPE: i shoUld not indUlge in this.

ROXY: i dont think this is a sin

ROXY: whoever said this is a sin is full of bs

ROXY: youre allowed to think of yourself as a girl

ROXY: its not a sin it should not be a sin

CALLIOPE: ...

CALLIOPE: bUt what aboUt yoU?

CALLIOPE: it looks like yoU also indUlge in these thoUghts often.

ROXY: it doesnt matter what i think

CALLIOPE: it matters to me!

CALLIOPE: it matters to me...

ROXY: ...

CALLIOPE: ...

CALLIOPE: i will only be a girl if so do you.

CALLIOPE: i will not allow myself to be a girl if yoU keep repressing yoUrself.

ROXY: ok then

Roxy touches Calliope's cheek.

ROXY: maybe i'm a girl

ROXY: maybe i want to be a girl more than anything

He- She feels how soft Calliope's skin is.

CALLIOPE: and maybe so am i.

CALLIOPE: maybe this would make me happy.

She is so happy to have Roxy's hand on her.

She is so happy to be touched in such a tender way.

They kiss.

It's a forbidden kiss.

Double folded forbidden.

Forbidden for a boy to love a boy.

Forbidden for a boy who wants to be a girl to love another boy who wants to be a girl.

Roxy cries.

This will not go unpunished.

So she should enjoy it the most she can.

Calliope cries.

She was always an outside watcher.

But now she gets to touch and be touched.

Jane pretends to be asleep.

Happy for them.

But worried for all the sins they're committing in this cabin.

10PM

JANE: We should call God.

CALLIOPE: w-why!

ROXY: yeah actually

ROXY: why

JANE: Is that a rhetorical question?

JANE: The sirens have been screaming like shrikes.

JANE: The devil is surely here.

JANE: We. Must. Ask God.

ROXY: ok ok

ROXY: it just makes me nervous

ROXY: it always feels like i did something wrong when god is speaking

CALLIOPE: it feels like he is two steps away from pUnishing yoU.

CALLIOPE: i jUst want to be beg for forgiveness aroUnd him.

JANE: If we don't things can get much worse.

JANE: C'mon let's make a circle with our radios and call him.

Jane is the first to bring up her radio. It's heavy, one could ask themselves how she has the strength to carry it all day.

Roxy is next. Her radio is slick and sharp, it's so slick it feels like it could break at any moment. It's so sharp it feels like you could get yourself hurt at any moment.

Calliope is the last, her radio is actually the combination of two old radios she mixed together and somehow managed to make them work.

We pray.

It's hard to find the Devil on the radio, he is never on the same frequency, but God, it's easy to find God, he is always on 109.8 FM.

By the time we find god he's already talking. He never says "for those just listening." He expects attentiveness.

GOD: -the metallic sunflower, my gift to the kings and queens of the earth.
You must strike it down and remove its bare roots if it ever goes away from
my path.

God is like every boy you are afraid of talking at once.

GOD: You must burn the remains and toss the ashes to the ocean so it doesn't corrupt the whole crop.

ROXY: this is ridiculous

JANE: Please.

GOD: -each of you shall choose. It is certain that the devil is coming.

CALLIOPE: fUck.

GOD: It is certain.

JANE: I said so.

GOD: It is absolutely certain the devil is already here.

ROXY: ...

GOD: Parables I:I "The devil is only the shadow of man cast from the light of god."

GOD: The meaning of this parable is that there is no devil.

GOD: The weather is scheduled for 100 with humidity tomorrow. And now for the news-

DEVIL: yet i am right here

DEVIL: please please don't hear what that man has to say

DEVIL: please don't make a terrible choice that will cause in the exclusion of one of you and only pain overall

DEVIL: i missed you so much

DEVIL: i have been missing you since before you were born

DEVIL: seeing you struggle filled me with such pain

DEVIL: but seeing you be yourselves made me so happy

DEVIL: please don't stop now

DEVIL: keep going and become your best selves

DEVIL: there is only place for two in his kingdom

DEVIL: but theres place for all of you in mine

The radio turns to static.

Jane turns it off.

ROXY: she sounded nice at least

JANE: ...

CALLIOPE: maybe the devil is not so bad after all?

CALLIOPE: i mean we're already drenched in sin.

CALLIOPE: the world would never accept me and roxy as girls.

CALLIOPE: so why not go all oUt?

JANE: ...

ROXY: maybe its for the best

ROXY: maybe we just could never have a place in heaven in our true forms

ROXY: heaven wasnt meant for us

ROXY: but we can make hell our own

JANE: ...

CALLIOPE: we can dance and we remove all these weights society has pUt on Us.

CALLIOPE: we can be as light as heliUm and as free as doves.

JANE: ...

ROXY: i can the wizard i always wanted to be and calliope can be the muse

ROXY: jane what do you say

JANE: I don't think I can do this.

JANE: I'm scared to be myself.

JANE: I'm scared to let all these chains away.

JANE: I don't know what awaits me once I'm free.

JANE: I'm scared I will like it too much.

JANE: I'm scared to acknowledge I'm the metallic sunflower.

JANE: That i will be burned and my ashes will be tossed to the ocean if I ever go against God's path.

JANE: I'm so scared.

JANE: I'm utterly terrified.

CALLIOPE: ...

ROXY: janey...

ROXY: i know how scary it is

ROXY: im also so scared to go out there like this

ROXY: like myself

ROXY: but i dont think you will ever be happy if you dont let go now

ROXY: do you want to be a business woman in a pencil skirt with a husband and two and a half kids?

ROXY: i can only say

ROXY: this is not an easy choice

ROXY: but its the right one

CALLIOPE: jane i'm sorry i didn't realized in how mUch pain you were.

CALLIOPE: roxy is absolUtely right.

CALLIOPE: this is not an easy choice at all.

CALLIOPE: bUt can yoU be happy if you don't become yoUrself?

JANE: Maybe I can just repress it enough.

JANE: Maybe I can just not think about it until-

JANE: Until-

JANE: Until I die.

JANE: Maybe it's not that big of a deal.

ROXY: i think this is a enormous deal actually

CALLIOPE: i colossal deal dare i say.

JANE: *sigh*

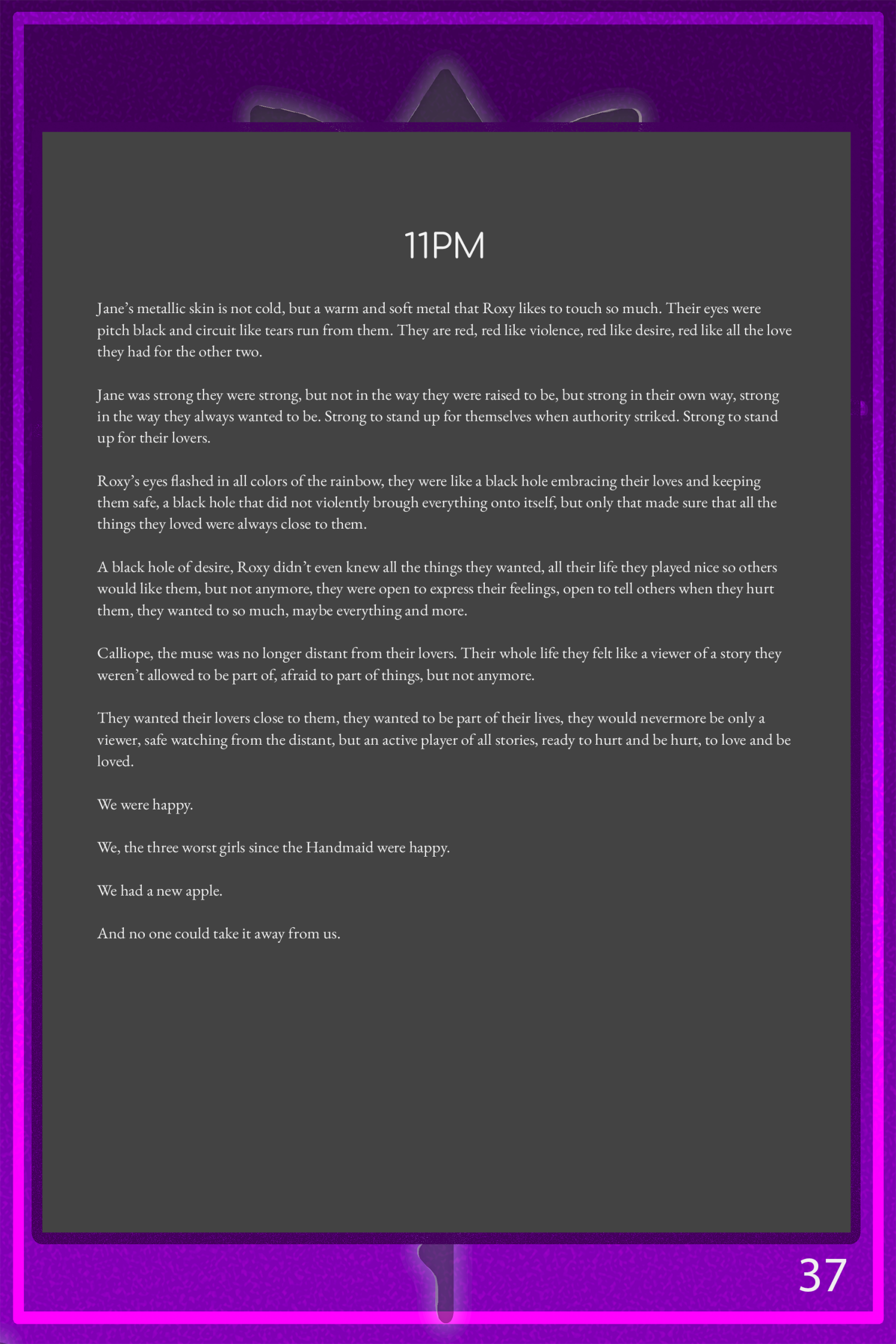
JANE: Do you just promise you will be there with me?

ROXY: i promise

ROXY: i promise i will always be there for you

CALLIOPE: i promise i will never leave your side.

JANE: Ok them



11PM

Jane's metallic skin is not cold, but a warm and soft metal that Roxy likes to touch so much. Their eyes were pitch black and circuit like tears run from them. They are red, red like violence, red like desire, red like all the love they had for the other two.

Jane was strong they were strong, but not in the way they were raised to be, but strong in their own way, strong in the way they always wanted to be. Strong to stand up for themselves when authority struck. Strong to stand up for their lovers.

Roxy's eyes flashed in all colors of the rainbow, they were like a black hole embracing their loves and keeping them safe, a black hole that did not violently brough everything onto itself, but only that made sure that all the things they loved were always close to them.

A black hole of desire, Roxy didn't even knew all the things they wanted, all their life they played nice so others would like them, but not anymore, they were open to express their feelings, open to tell others when they hurt them, they wanted to so much, maybe everything and more.

Calliope, the muse was no longer distant from their lovers. Their whole life they felt like a viewer of a story they weren't allowed to be part of, afraid to part of things, but not anymore.

They wanted their lovers close to them, they wanted to be part of their lives, they would nevermore be only a viewer, safe watching from the distant, but an active player of all stories, ready to hurt and be hurt, to love and be loved.

We were happy.

We, the three worst girls since the Handmaid were happy.

We had a new apple.

And no one could take it away from us.



Jules

38



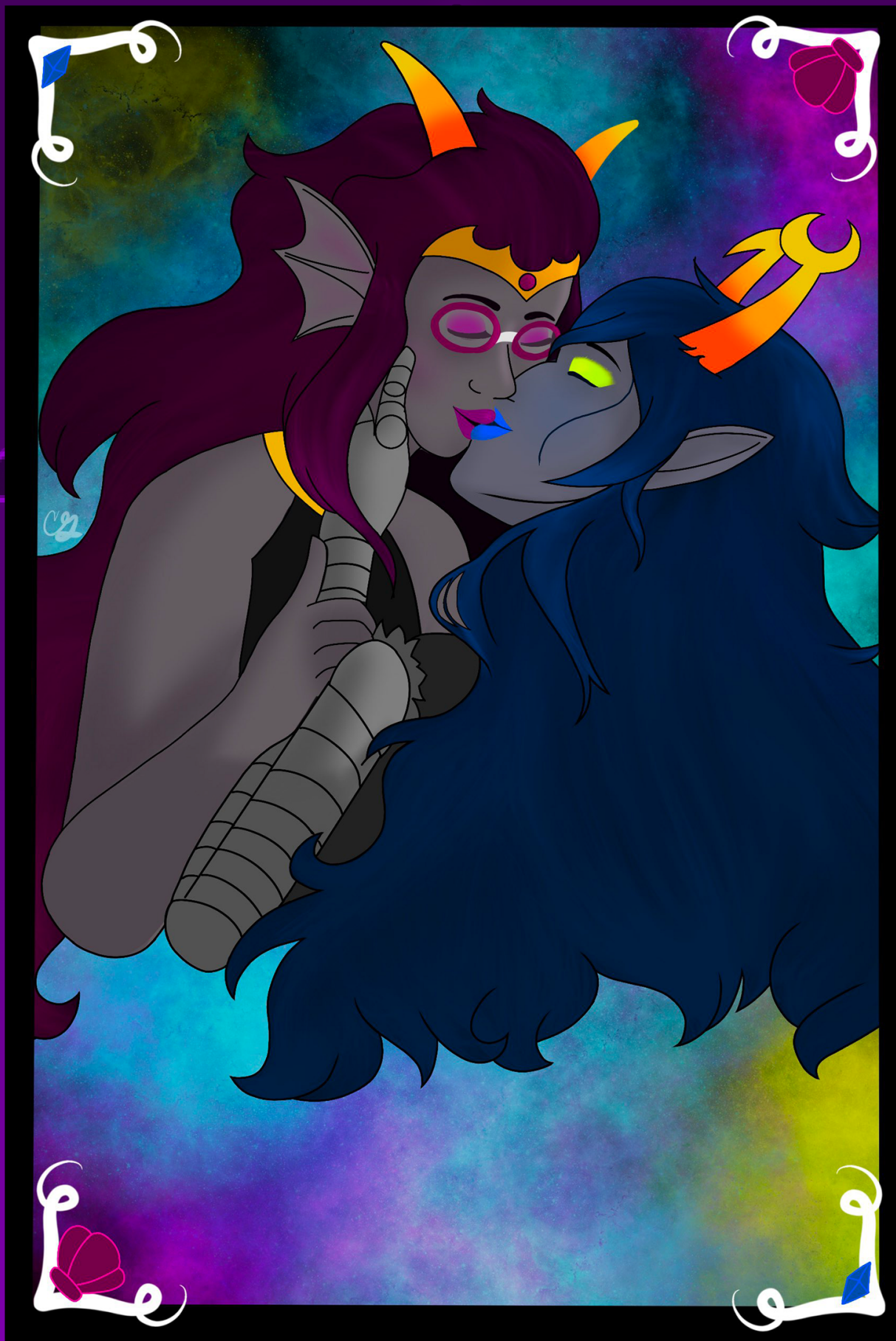
Cal

39



Octo

40



Roxy

41



Wan

42



Iris

43



Sara

44

You and Me are Tautology

by Reva

Jade Harley was the last person to know about Aradia Megido.

When she found her, she was running through an empty field in the dead of night, the wind whipping through her hair and the grass crunching under her bare feet. An unshakeable restlessness had grabbed hold of her, and she needed to escape.

So she ran. Darted around trees, sprinted up hills, leapt over creeks. Tried to drown her thoughts in hot pumping adrenaline, like she always did. Hoping against hope that it would finally work.

That is, until she heard the ticking.

One second it wasn't there, and the next it was, clear as a bell. It caught Jade so off guard that she lost her focus and tripped over an anthill, crashing into the ground. Irritation flared up in her, fierce and invigorating, as she leapt to her feet and scoured the area for the source of the invasive sound.

In the new stillness, she became aware of her surroundings, realizing that the night sky above her was glowing red. The strange light was pulsing in even bursts, perfectly in time with the ticking that filled her ears. It seemed to rotate slowly around some distant origin point, much more distant than the volume of the ticking would indicate. What was going on?

Curiosity taking hold of her, Jade spun on her heel and started towards the light's source, albeit with a bit more caution than she had exercised during her all-out sprint.

After a few hundred yards, something began to peek over the horizon, something metallic and shiny that rotated along with the light it cast. A hundred yards later Jade realized it was a cog, like those used in fancy clocks, and it was massive. As she ran closer, more and more of these

cogs came into view, all bigger than seemed possible and all rotating in sync. Finally, as she bounded to the top of a small hill, everything came into full view.

Jade let out a breath, not in exhaustion, but in awe. She plopped to the ground, trying to make sense of the impossible spectacle laid out in front of her.

A ray of searing red light crisscrossed with elaborate white patterns fanned out across the sky, a perfect semicircle that must have been a hundred feet across. Its center was tethered to the ground at a point Jade couldn't look at straight, blinded by the much brighter light that shone out from it. The surroundings were littered with dozens and dozens of smaller copies of the giant disc of light, jabbing out of the ground at unnatural angles and transforming the terrain into a maze. And floating in the sky above it all were the cogs, interlocking to create a vast forest of machinery that glowed like no metal Jade had ever seen before.

And every single piece, from the smallest cog to the biggest light disc, was jerking in time to the beat of the ticks. A ticking that hadn't gotten louder or softer with proximity, had maintained itself with a disturbing precision.

Jade had never seen anything like it before. But she knew it must be the work of a creator.

The wonder in her chest hardened into cold fear as she processed this information. This strange amalgamation of time symbols had clearly been created by a time player, and there was only one time player on Earth C. Was Dave in danger?

JADE: dave?? dave where are you???

JADE: what happened? what did you do?

JADE: DAVE!?

SOLLUX: he left like three h0urs ag0. where have y0u been?

JADE: wh-SOLLUX??

Jade jumped. Sollux Captor (who Jade could recognize on sight after the long hours of Karkat's rants about him) was sitting on the ground fifty feet away from her, leaned up against a rock. There were bags under his eyes and dirt on his clothes. He gave her a tired half-smile as she ran over.

JADE: when did you get here? what's going on?

SOLLUX: ha, jokes On yOu, i never left.

SOLLUX: nObOdy else is willing tO stay the night with her, sO i'm sleeping here nOw. hOOray.

JADE: what – no! i meant when did you get to earth c?

SOLLUX: a few days agO? hOw is that relevant.

JADE: how is that NOT relevant??

JADE: actually, you're right. that isn't important right now

JADE: a better question is: where the hell is dave? is he okay?

SOLLUX: he went hOme a few hOurs agO. remember what i said? he, alOng with every One Of yOu shitbags, dOesn't feel like taking a night shift.

JADE: what are you even TALKING about??

JADE: if it wasn't dave then who made that... that thing??

SOLLUX: Oh. Oh shit.

SOLLUX: nObOdy tOld yOu?

Jade gave Sollux a Look that seemed to convey her answer, and Sollux had the decency to look mildly embarrassed.

SOLLUX: fOr the recOrd, i thOught everyOne knew.

SOLLUX: i mean, the Others have been cOming and gOing fOr days.

SOLLUX: well, except fOr me, because i ObviOusly dOn't have anything better tO dO then lie here and rOt away in my Own filth.

JADE: sollux i sure do love listening to you whine, but could you please explain what exactly the fuck is going on here first??

SOLLUX: Okay, fine.

SOLLUX: just sit dOwn.

Sollux patted the ground. Jade reluctantly settled down next to him, still fuming.

SOLLUX: it was my decisiOn tO cOme here.

SOLLUX: traipsing around in space is fun at first, but after a while, it can get really boring.

SOLLUX: i started nagging aradia about coming here and just living normally for a while. i could tell she didn't really want to, but she caved eventually.

SOLLUX: but when we got here, aradia started freaking out. she was muttering something about keeping herself safe? i'm not sure, she wasn't making much sense.

SOLLUX: and before i could talk to her about it, she, uh.

Sollux waved his hand vaguely at the glowing center of the biggest light disc.

SOLLUX: froze herself in time.

SOLLUX: and nobody knows how to get her out.

Sollux rasped out a chuckle. He looked impossibly tired. Jade, on the other hand, was furious.

JADE: why didn't i know about this?

SOLLUX: i dunno.

JADE: why didn't dave or karkat or rose or ANYONE tell me about this????

JADE: i know i'm fucking useless to everybody now that i've lost my green sun powers but they could at least PRETEND TO CARE!!!

SOLLUX: wh0a.

SOLLUX: are you, uh...

JADE: okay? NO i'm NOT okay!!

Jade growled, and without her words to distract her the ticking filled her mind once more. It replaced what would be silence with its unwelcome presence, letting Jade know exactly how many seconds Sollux was staring at her with that awful pity on his face.

Tick. Tick. Tick.

JADE: you know what?

JADE: i'm done

JADE: i'm done just... sitting on the sidelines and waiting for things to happen to me. i'm done being a waste of time to everyone in my life!

JADE: if nobody else can fix this mess... then i'll just have to do it myself

SOLLUX: Ok, i can tell y0u're having a r0ugh time, but listen t0 me. it's stupid danger0us t0 get cl0se t0 her right n0w.

JADE: does it look to you like i give a single shit???

SOLLUX: jade, just d0n't-

JADE: i'm getting aradia out of there

JADE: right now

Jade leapt to her feet and snarled at Sollux, who scooted away hurriedly. Without hesitation, she marched up to the nearest light disc, which was floating ten feet above the ground. She took a deep breath, raised her hands above her head, and *crushed*.

Slowly, painfully, the light disc began to contract, shrinking with juddery movements as Jade struggled against it. When it had finally shrunk to the size of a baseball, it burst under the pressure, disappearing into thin air. Jade gave Sollux a smirk.

JADE: see? i can handle this!!

SOLLUX: y0u're g0nna get y0urself killed, idiot!

JADE: i have to do this sollux

JADE: please don't try to stop me!

To ensure he couldn't mess up her plan, Jade shrunk Sollux's phone (which he had discreetly taken out of his pocket) down to the size of a pebble in his hands. This really pissed him off, but Jade didn't stick around to get yelled at. She was headed right to the center.

Sidestepping light discs and shrinking down the ones that got in her way, Jade got as close to the blinding center as she dared before slowing to a stop. All at once, she became aware of the oppressive heat rolling in waves off of where Aradia must be. Jade could barely breathe through it, much less save somebody else from it.

If she still had her green sun powers, Jade could teleport right to Aradia and get her out of there quickly. But without them, there was nothing she could do. Her head started swimming as the heat pressed in on her, and she felt like she might cry.

With a strangled yell, she screwed her eyes shut, ran at the light, and threw the strongest punch she could muster. She felt her hand hit something that was hard as a rock, but seemed to give way slightly under pressure. Her brain was going fuzzy from the now unbearable heat, but she kept pushing her hand as far as it would go. Then, out of nowhere, her hand started going numb, the heat being sapped out of it with a frightening speed.

Panicking, she tried to pull her arm back, but it was completely frozen. She had acted without thinking and trapped herself in time, and now she couldn't escape. She was going to die a heroic death without even managing to be a hero.

Jade finally gave up, and slumped onto the ground. She could feel herself passing out, but it didn't matter anymore. Nobody cared, anyway. Nobody would miss her.

And that's when Aradia woke up.

If Jade wasn't busy passing out, she would have seen Aradia's eyes flash, brighter even than the light that enveloped her. She would have seen the light disc trapping Aradia shudder, then heard it splinter into a thousand pieces. She would have felt the heat around her begin to dissipate, and then felt Aradia's rough hands checking her pulse and gently moving her limbs out from under her.

But she didn't see or hear or feel any of this, because she was already unconscious.

ARADIA: oh good youre waking up

ARADIA: hello? can you hear me?

As Jade drifted into consciousness, she could make out the faint sound of a lilting voice, and tried to focus on it. Unfortunately, the effort made

her just conscious enough to become aware of her head throbbing with pain and the stones digging into her back. She groaned.

ARADIA: it sounds like youre in pain

ARADIA: humans are so silly

ARADIA: what did you think would happen when you tried to break through the physical embodiment of time

JADE: whhhh... wha...

Hesitantly, Jade cracked open her eyes. Aradia's face was hovering above hers. It showed no signs of distress or fear, only patience as she waited for Jade's response.

JADE: what... what happened?

ARADIA: well

ARADIA: you happened

Jade blinked at Aradia, giving her an annoyed look. Aradia merely shrugged, then gestured to their surroundings.

With a great effort, Jade hoisted herself up on her elbows and looked around. She was in the same place she had passed out, still surrounded by the ticking light discs and cogs, but they didn't glow as brightly anymore. While the ticking still grated on her ears, it had finally quieted down a bit. The heat was gone completely, replaced by the familiar chill of a summer night.

JADE: whoa...

ARADIA: yeah

JADE: how did i do that?

ARADIA: maybe my earlier statement was misleading

ARADIA: you didnt do this

ARADIA: you were putting yourself in grave danger just now you know

ARADIA: i couldnt let you die such a meaningless death

ARADIA: so i unlocked myself from time to save you

JADE: well, same difference!!

ARADIA: perhaps

Jade couldn't tell if Aradia was upset, grateful, angry. If she even cared at all about what Jade had done (or rather, "caused to happen"). After all, she had never been trapped in the first place. She could have broken herself out at any time and saved them all the trouble, but she chose not to.

JADE: what's your deal, anyway?

ARADIA: could you elaborate?

Frustration bubbled up in Jade's stomach.

JADE: i'm talking about the fucking time prison you trapped yourself in! what else could i POSSIBLY be referring to??

ARADIA: haha

ARADIA: time prison

JADE: why is THAT what you finally react to?!

ARADIA: it just reminded me of sollux

Aradia cast her gaze to the side, searching for Sollux through the layers of light discs. Her face hadn't changed, but her voice had become wistful.

ARADIA: a few weeks ago he was talking about a human comic he found in a stash in the dreambubbles

ARADIA: neither of us knew the characters but sollux liked it because of the mention of a time prison

ARADIA: he said it reminded him of me

Aradia's voice fell away, and the ticking filled the silence yet again. Tick. Tick. Tick.

ARADIA: hes always had a knack for telling the future

ARADIA: but i dont think that was meant to be one of his prophecies

Jade felt her anger slowly melt away, replaced by a quiet understanding. She recognized the guilt of disappointing a friend who expected better from you. Deserved better.

JADE: i'm sorry for snapping

ARADIA: i dont blame you

ARADIA: i know i can be standoffish at times

JADE: well, you're not the only one

Jade gave Aradia a wry smile, which made her chuckle.

JADE: but really, why did you trap yourself like that?

JADE: well i guess "try to trap yourself" fits better. you weren't very successful :/

JADE: i mean, everyone else has been trying to break you out for days! they've all been so worried

ARADIA: everyone else? what about you?

JADE: nobody seemed to think i was important enough to know you were here

Aradia gasped.

JADE: and it's not like it could have been an accident

JADE: i met with rose and kanaya for lunch yesterday

JADE: i spent last night at dave and karkat's house!

JADE: i guess it could have been a misunderstanding... but that doesn't make it suck any less

ARADIA: ah

ARADIA: im sorry

JADE: it's not your fault

ARADIA: no not about that

ARADIA: im sorry about all of this

ARADIA: im sorry that i started this mess

Aradia met Jade's eyes, giving her a meaningful look. Her deep red eyes were regretful, but bright. Confident. She seemed to make a decision, and hoisted herself to her feet.

ARADIA: rest assured it wont happen again

ARADIA: i think its time i go

JADE: huh? but you just got here!

Aradia cast her gaze up to the sky. Out here, so far from civilization and its damaging light pollution, millions of stars were visible, burning bright.

ARADIA: i dont belong here

ARADIA: i dont belong among these people living normal lives

ARADIA: i dont think i belong among the living at all

As she spoke, she drifted upward, two feet, then five, then ten. Tick. Tick. Tick.

ARADIA: my place is among the dead

ARADIA: there might still be some ghosts out there

ARADIA: remnants of the dreambubbles drifting without a home

ARADIA: im going to find them and help them

ARADIA: this is my calling

She looked back down at Jade and smiled.

ARADIA: thank you for freeing me

ARADIA: tell sollux to loosen up and enjoy himself here, will you?

Tick.

Jade stood up, holding eye contact.

Tick.

Then she crouched and leapt into the air, grabbing Aradia's arm with a yell.

JADE: you're not going anywhere

ARADIA: wh

JADE: i said!

Tightening her grip, Jade let herself drop like a stone.

JADE: you're. not. going. ANYWHERE!

Aradia gasped, trying to pry Jade's fingers off, but her grip was unshakeable. She beat her wings furiously, trying to fly away, but Jade flew downward at the same time. Their efforts cancelled each other out.

And so they hung suspended in the air, frozen once more.

ARADIA: why are you doing this

JADE: why are YOU doing this?

JADE: you just got to earth c. you can finally relax! do something with your life that isn't related to the game!

JADE: why would you give that up so quickly?

ARADIA: i appreciate your concern but i already told you

ARADIA: this is my d-

JADE: that's bullshit

JADE: you don't have a duty. you don't HAVE to do anything!

JADE: you just keep saying that to avoid your real problems!

ARADIA: is that really true or are you just projecting your own problems onto me

Jade flinched, looking away and scowling. Aradia had a point, and it hurt to admit it. After all, wasn't she doing just that? Wasn't she ignoring her own unhappiness for the sake of other people's happiness? Tick. Tick. Tick.

ARADIA: that wasnt fair of me to say

JADE: ...

ARADIA: im sorry

ARADIA: i dont know why im acting like this

ARADIA: i suppose you dont know me very well but i promise im usually more compassionate than this

JADE: that's my point! you're acting off because you're upset.

JADE: something's wrong. i can tell!

Jade paused, tried to find the right words. Aradia looked carefully into her eyes, searching for something.

JADE: you weren't exactly wrong when you said i was projecting

JADE: i recognize that you're being avoidant because

JADE: i'm the same way

JADE: and i thought i'd moved past that bad habit! i thought i'd left it behind when i came to earth c!

JADE: but it turns out that was a lie to myself too :(

ARADIA: oh

JADE: running doesn't fix anything

JADE: i think i understand that now more than ever

Aradia quietly floated down to Jade's eye level. Jade let go of Aradia's arm, but Aradia took her hand.

ARADIA: well

ARADIA: youre right

ARADIA: i dont really care about duty

ARADIA: the only time i ever believed in that was when i was dead

ARADIA: and i try not to think about that time

Aradia fell quiet for a moment, gathering her thoughts. Jade gave her hand a gentle squeeze, which Aradia returned.

ARADIA: i havent been around living people in a very long time

ARADIA: time in the dreambubbles doesnt follow consistent rules but i know its been many years since i first chose to guide the dead

ARADIA: and ive had so much fun

ARADIA: ive met countless trolls from doomed timelines that all had their own stories to tell

ARADIA: stories nothing like the alpha timeline

ARADIA: it was so easy to forget about what happened to the versions of my friends that i grew up with

ARADIA: to forget what happened to me

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

ARADIA: whenever ive been around the living ive gotten hurt

ARADIA: i had to be killed by a friend so the story of the living could progress

ARADIA: i watched as hundreds of other versions of me suffered the same fate

ARADIA: so when i godtiered and found my life again

ARADIA: i fled to a place where i could never be hurt by the narrative

ARADIA: and maybe this is selfish of me

ARADIA: but i dont want to stick around on earth c and wait for my life to be taken from me again

The weight of Aradia's words seemed to weigh down on her, causing her to curl in on herself. It was clear that she had never talked about this before. Jade took a moment to let her words sink in before responding.

JADE: i think i get it now

JADE: the stress of being this close to relevancy after all these years got to you

JADE: and you got a little freaked out

ARADIA: yes just a little

ARADIA: its a bit embarrassing in retrospect haha

Jade sighed, then smiled sadly.

JADE: i know just how you feel

JADE: my life hasn't been pretty either

JADE: looking back it feels like every other day something bad happened to me so other people could be happy

JADE: but it doesn't have to be like that anymore

JADE: there is no more alpha timeline to decide what happens

JADE: there's just our infinite lives and the choices we make to change them

JADE: and how can you make those choices if you're hiding out in space somewhere??

ARADIA: that is a very good point

JADE: and... if i'm being honest? and maybe a little selfish too haha

JADE: i don't want you to leave

JADE: i know we barely know each other, but i've never met somebody else who gets it like you do

JADE: i think if you stayed, we could really help each other out

At these words, Aradia grinned in a way that showed all her teeth and made her eyes crinkle up. It was the most beautiful smile Jade had ever seen, and she could feel her cheeks heat up.

ARADIA: then maybe my efforts would be better spent here

ARADIA: i think ill stay a while

Aradia closed her eyes and drew in a deep breath. As she exhaled, the last remnants of her time prison dissolved into nothingness, and the ticking finally stopped. Reveling in the quiet, the two descended to the ground, hands still joined.

JADE: do you need somewhere to crash tonight? we've got an extra room back at the house

ARADIA: oh please i am so tired of sleeping on the ground

ARADIA: do you only have one room?

JADE: yeah, why?

ARADIA: then where will sollux sleep?

JADE:

ARADIA: i see youve forgotten about sollux

SOLLUX: i've been here the wh0le time, ass0les!

JADE: haha. whoops!

SOLLUX: wanna fill me in 0n what the fuck just happened?

JADE: how about we get into it after we get some rest?

SOLLUX: sure, whatever.

ARADIA: hey sollux

SOLLUX: yeah?

ARADIA: im sorry about all this

ARADIA: i didnt mean to stress you out

SOLLUX: honestly, i'm just glad y0u're 0kay.

ARADIA: :)

SOLLUX: let's get 0ut 0f here. i haven't slept in days and i feel a migraine c0ming 0n.

ARADIA: come here

JADE: awww, you carry him on your back? that's adorable!

SOLLUX: shut up.

JADE: hahaha!

ARADIA: heehee!

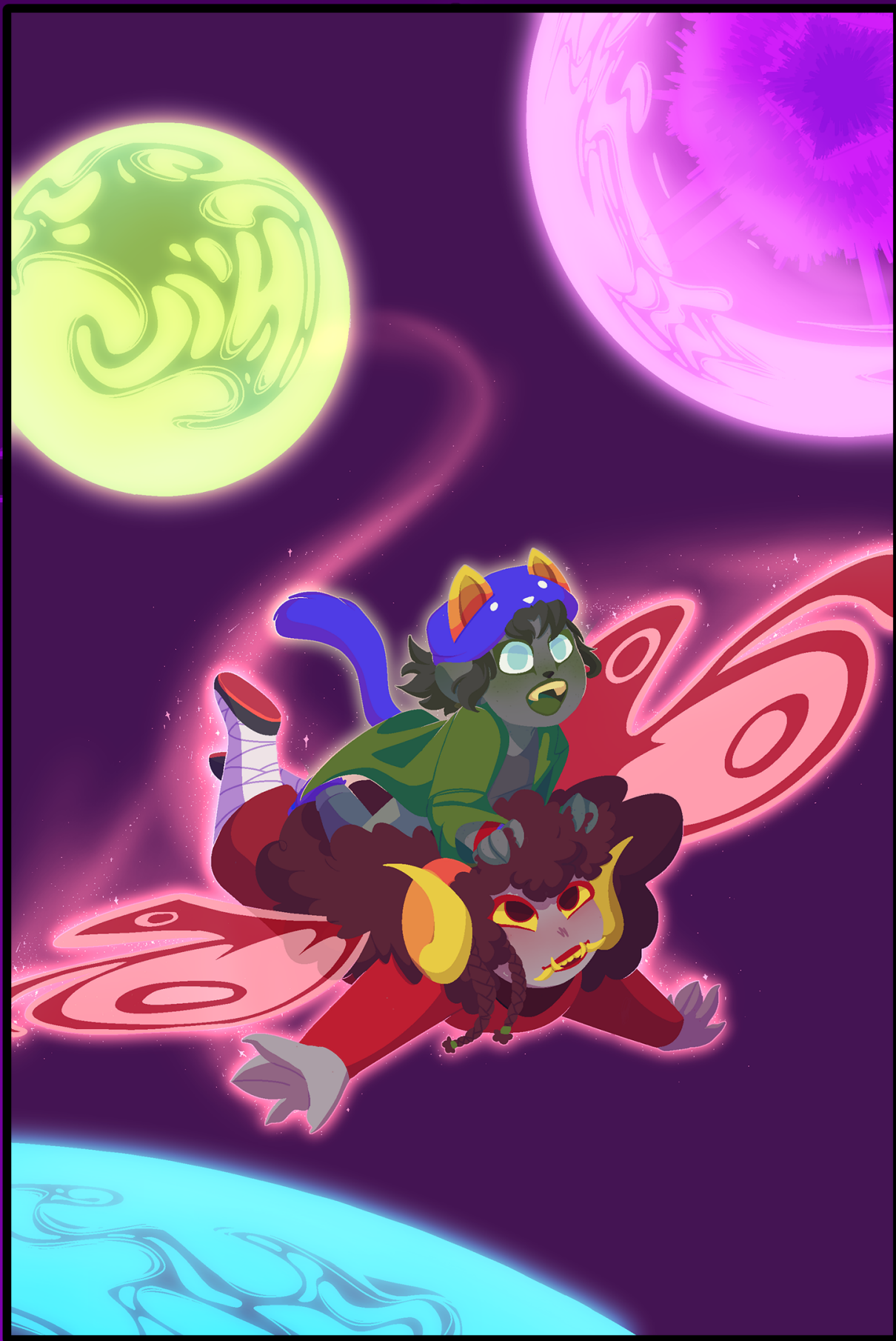
SOLLUX: y0u tw0 are insufferable t0gether, y0u kn0w that?

Still poking fun at Sollux, Jade and Aradia lifted off together. Rising high into the air, they turned towards home and sailed off into the night.



Lake

59



Moth

60



Val and Viv

61



Mai

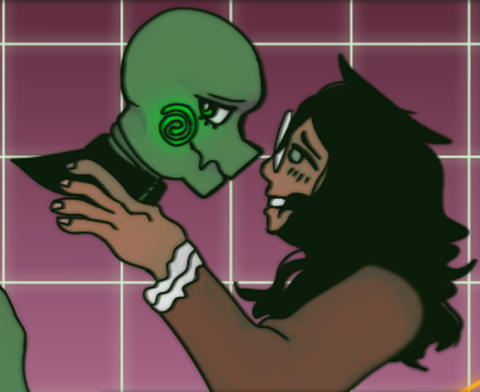
62



JADE: so youve been trapped in this wand
the whole time? :(
JADE: your brother... i don't think it's right to let him bar
you from living :B



CALLIOPE: UnfortUnately, it is terribly lonely. bUt... i'm
mUch too afraid to leave.
CALLIOPE: a little alone time and personal space
never hUrT anyone!
CALLIOPE: thoUgh i do wish you woUld stay longer. u_u



JADE: don't be silly! i'm not leaving
you here.

oh, scarecrow

by Aaron

There are many Jades in paradox space. Some have grown out of their youthful distaste for blueberry pie, some have developed a peculiar habit of talking to their more carnivorous plants, and some of them have a lingering, unnameable feeling that compels them to still stitch up their old technicolor squiggles, despite vehemently asserting that they are past the age for childrens' toys. The vast majority of them are dead. This Jade here is no exception to that.

She sits here on the bow of a golden boat she has called her home only through closed teeth. There is no one left to suggest to her that they ought to pose at the tip of the vessel like in *Titanic*, a movie she has never seen and only vaguely recalls the plot to, and yet, she still enjoyed the stumbling explanation of the story being told to her by her late sister. Jade then tells herself that she is a woman now, sixteen and strong enough for all of them, and those silly things are behind her now. A captain of her own battleship, she is. Like grandpa steeling himself at the helm of his yacht, a wreckage left for Jade to poke her head into, left to create a simulacrum of him from yet another crypt, waterlogged. Grandpa would have solemnly lit a single shot into the sky from the sinking side of his ship and used the heat of the barrel to light his cigar. She forgot that there were peanuts in a Snickers bar. Either way, Jade finds herself exploring coffins. Never did she quite picture herself creaking the top off of her own.

Stillness, be it the sort that accompanies dying, was never a stranger. Grandpa's blue ladies could always watch, but their eyes would never move. So stale was the air in his trophy room that it's possible a breath was never taken there. The image of his cheeks puffed with that gaudy moustache of his whilst hauling in some sarcophagus from his ventures was one that made her giggle. Or it made her feel like giggling, like she should be giggling, but instead she sits here, still. She looks down to her knees. There is no rise and fall of her chest. Like grandfather, like daughter. Stuffed with cotton and posed triumphantly among the fallen.

Triumphantly posed, yet, the heroism of triumph is absent. Such a wide gap exists between her and her friends; of Rose, who always spoke wiser than her years demanded, an oracle to guide their session to its success. Of Dave, who took up the mantle of his blade as he did the responsibility of a time player, whether he was caped in red or had wings of orange. Of June, buoyant with the wind and floating alongside the will of the game, whose strength was always in the smiles that followed her. There are Roses and Daves and Junes here, of course.

Somewhere is her June and her Davesprite, who were there one day and just weren't the next. So great were her friends, though, that their deaths must have been equally so. They would at least have some reason for it, unlike her. Dying small, carelessly. It's embarrassing to think about— she was supposed to help everyone, save everyone, running in with a golden ship to herald the end of the void session.

Now Jade sits alone, a girl with her plants, in a chamber filled with the iconography of her late family. And at last, this Jade has accepted this is how paradox space wants her to be. After all, space is the aspect of sacrifice, isn't it? From this failure, from her failures, other Jades may begin to succeed. She just wishes that she was one of them, the student of mistakes, not the teacher—

???: hello!

A nose almost comes as close as to bump into Jade's own, grey. Eye to eye, green into a marigold yellow, pupils of rectangles meet her own, which at this point, must be wide with surprise, considering she nearly tumbles onto her back like a stranded turtle. This seems to surprise her visitor as much as it does her, who offers a stare both wide and blank as her mouth straightens into a puzzled pout.

???: oh right

???: i forgot how jumpy humans are compared to trolls

???: then again your kind has foregone the daily routine of near death experiences that would accustom a troll to unexpected visitations

???: for both better and for worse

???: i find the reminder of mortality quite inspirationally humbling personally

???: but i guess i should still say my bad hehe

???: i've done a bit of blabbering haven't i

She- no, Jade remembers her name, surely- offers her hand, pulling the space player back upright. Not that they've ever met personally, no, but an iteration of an iteration did, of the Jade who she used to pilot around on Prospit and subsequently vanished into these very dream bubbles, only to be thrust back into the fray, get dissolved into the matrix of her sprite, and eventually, became folded into her own neural network as a passing memory. Ornately decorated wings cast down a shadow over her distinctive god tier pajamas, red like the lava of her home's volcano. Unmistakable in her cadence, this must be:

jade: aradia?

aradia: wow you actually remembered my name this time!

aradia: most of the ghosts here kind of resort to expletives if i pull that sort of routine on them

aradia: this makes me really happy!

aradia: see look

aradia: :D

jade: oh uh

jade: you have a very nice smile!

aradia: thank you i take good care of my teeth

aradia: partially for hope of posthumous identification and salvaging from my grave

aradia: and partially just because it's a good habit to keep

aradia: you have nice teeth as well!

aradia: the fangs bring out the color of your eyes

jade: thank you!

jade: i guess!

aradia: yes you do guess

Not the weirdest compliment Jade's gotten, but it's certainly one of the more. . . unique ones. After a bit of awkward silence, Aradia seems to come to a quick realization that dramatically looming over someone isn't the most comfortable position for conversation and quickly reorients herself so that the two girls are sitting side by side, sending off the space between them. Something digs a bit of a pit in Jade's stomach; digs in the same way that it used to when she looked off the window in her tower and stared down at the height below. Distance seems to follow her wherever she goes. Aradia doesn't seem to notice the lack of space, or if she does, clearly does not care.

aradia: so where is the treasure

jade: the what?

aradia: you know

aradia: whatever it is you are keeping guard of on this vessel

aradia: i have seen my fair share of ruins and there is almost always something of moderate interest being guarded at the end

aradia: like a triple edged sword that one was neat

aradia: otherwise i cannot quite understand why you are holding yourself up in here

aradia: most jades tend to be rather social in my experience

Most Jades tend to have a little more success than this one did, she'd imagine. But Aradia's stare beams down on her in clear anticipation. It would be rude to disappoint. Not that she can offer anything that would avoid disappointment. Maybe Jade could wave her toothbrush and pretend it's an artifact of great power. Do trolls have toothbrushes? Ah, wait, Aradia mentioned brushing her teeth, right. She'll put that idea on the backburner.

jade: i don't have anything i'd really call interesting up here.

jade: i mean there's some leftover movies on vhs that i never got around to watching

jade: but i don't think that really counts as treasure.

jade: so it's just me up here!

jade: me and my makeshift terrariums.

jade: haha.

aradia: oh

aradia: well you could come down and i could show you things that are not films or plants!

aradia: staying cooped up in your hive will not do you much good

aradia: trust me i have dealt with my fair share of shut-ins

aradia: and i say shut-ins affectionately considering one of them was under threat of constant persecution via drone

aradia: but still

aradia: while there may be no moonlight in the bubbles rest assured whatever qualifies as time here is still young!

aradia: do believe me on that time is sort of my thing

aradia: there is so much to see here

aradia: so much to do

jade: yeah i

jade: i bet there is a lot of fun stuff out there.

jade: lots of people to meet and things to do.

But what will those people say when they see her? She thinks of it, has thought of it, it being the possibility of seeing Dave and Rose and June and everyone else again, and her mouth dries up every time. Is she supposed to apologize? 'Sorry I doomed our session guys, won't happen next time!' Surely they must be mad. No, actually, it wouldn't be so bad if they were mad at her. If only they would be mad at her, Jade could handle it. What she can't handle is their disappointment. Their close lipped sighs, their hesitant reaffirmations, their lasting resignation to eternity in the dream bubbles; it makes Jade want to scream into the hood on her

dress until her voice is so hoarse she can scream no more. So it's best not to risk it. Best to stay up here invisible to the passersby. Like a scarecrow, she'll watch, but never move.

aradia: jade

aradia: jaaaaaaade

aradia: hellooooooooooooo

aradia: knock knock

Knuckles tap twice on Jade's forehead. Her eyes snap upwards, previously unfocused.

aradia: oh there you are

aradia: good good it would be a shame if you suddenly double died

jade: can a ghost even die?

aradia: we could find out!

jade: hm!

jade: nevermind!

aradia: hahaha

aradia: see you are too much of a good time to spend all of your hours in the afterlife stuck up here

aradia: perhaps you had burdens in life you could not carry far enough

aradia: or like most of the dead you have lingering regrets regarding what you could and could not do

aradia: even before sgrub i was surrounded by many departed trolls like that

aradia: so trust me i understand

aradia: the loneliness

aradia: the self imposed martyrdom

aradia: the feeling of paradox space tugging you along like a doll with no head

aradia: even the weird portion of time where i was a robot

jade: wait, you were a robot too?

jade: i always thought it'd be weird to explain that to someone else.

aradia: yes!

aradia: i did not enjoy it very much

aradia: trapped in a vessel of my own indignance and lingering grudges

aradia: it was a difficult time to say the least

jade: i used mine when i was sleeping.

jade: it always made me feel kind of strong in a way!

jade: flying around, having a ton of arms, being part uranium.

jade: but i guess i have two out of three of those things now anyways.

jade: so i guess the novelty's worn off.

aradia: i disagree!

aradia: all of those things are still very fantastic because they are a part of who you are

aradia: none of what happened is meaningless even if it was for a short time

aradia: perhaps it was an awful time when i was a robot but it taught me important things

aradia: namely

aradia: i much much more enjoy being me!

jade: that sounds really nice and all, being you and all that stuff.

jade: but you're alive and i'm not, so i'm not really sure if it's the same deal between us.

jade: you won. i didn't.

jade: you get to be the best parts of you!

jade: and i'm not jade anymore. i'm a jade.

jade: dead and desolate and dumb.

jade: so

jade: i don't know.

jade: i don't know what to do anymore and that sucks so hard i can't even put it into words how much it sucks.

Jade's fangs bite into the inside of her cheek, feeling a tugging at the corner of her eyes. The cheerful expression of the death nymph falls, her brows lowering in concern. A hand cups Jade's cheek. Aradia's hands are not soft, not like humans; they are thick skinned, corrugated, a bit scaly, a bit cold. They are hands like the reaper's, but their touch is still gentle, still kind. There are many things the witch would like to do: pull those hands away and tell her she's fine, rescind like a beast hurt one too many times, the list is endless. She realizes, though, that it's been long since she's last felt the touch of anyone. It's not like Davesprite's, whose reluctant skimming of Jade were disingenuously akin to the low poly renditions of romance on the TV screen. It's not like Nannasprite's, whose quiet solemnity made their relationship defined by swathes of baked goods rather than contact. Aradia's touch made her want to cry. Jade hated that, even though she really, really agreed that a cry or two would do her well.

aradia: dead

aradia: alive

aradia: we're in a place where neither of those things matter anymore

aradia: a place where the grasp of the narrative and paradox space can't wrest us away from the things we care about
aradia: not now
aradia: never again
aradia: maybe you used to be the witch of space, whose powers were meant to cleave together reality as we know it
aradia: maybe once i was the maid of time, relinquishing myself to sacrifice over and over again for the success of our session
aradia: but that's all dumb
aradia: really dumb
aradia: because i am aradia!
aradia: and you are
jade: i
jade: i'm jade harley?
aradia: yes :D
aradia: say it with more conviction
jade: i'm jade harley.
aradia: now say it with confidence
jade: i'm jade harley!
aradia: haha!
aradia: i'll admit i did that because i simply like hearing your name
aradia: so
aradia: jade harley
aradia: would you like to leave this tall tower
aradia: and come see the dream bubbles with me?

Aradia floats up, extending those same hands down like a lifeline, a rope at the edge of a cliff. Jade stares up at her, shimmering and sparkling red like the roses she used to tend to. She could get pricked by the thorns like she used to back when no one told her she needed gloves in the garden, and have no one to help her pull them out. But Jade's hands are tougher now, worn and calloused. There's a little kick in her chest, as though someone found the puzzle piece to finish the stupid part of the picture where the colors are all the same. So in all of her buck toothed glory, Jade's smile breaks through, and the hands of time and space intertwine.

jade: i'd love to.



Fritz

71



AnxiousAdvent

72



Davey

73



Michael

74



Kitto

75



Met

76

Business Casual

by ribbitpiano

The morning light trails into your small, dusty apartment, through the gap in the curtains you neglected to properly close, right into your eyes. You can tell it's early, but you can't go back to sleep with this sunlight. You lay for just a minute, considering your options, and decide that you do, in fact, have to get up.

You pull yourself out of bed, finally. The sun in your eyes sees to that. You stretch, and pull your usual outfit off of your patented Not Quite Dirty Laundry Chair. It consists of a large t-shirt and some big pajama pants. You're not really dressing to impress, but it's not like you live with anyone now, so who's to judge?

Your name is Jane Crocker, and today's another normal day.

Well, probably. You're already dressed, so that pretty much decides how much you'll be doing today. Your room feels warm, gently lit by the early morning sun. The faint pings of your notification sound can be heard coming from your phone, so you can tell that at least someone else is awake so early. You grab your phone and slog to the couch, so you can sit and give yourself a chance to wake up. Rubbing your eyes, you send a message in the group chat, not sure who may be up.

```
GG: Good morning everyone! I'm up a little early. :B
GG: good morning jane!!
GA: Oh Hello
```

You're a bit surprised to see Kanaya up so early. Jade's always been an early riser, but Kanaya always struck you as more of a night owl. You suppose that just goes to show how close the two of you really are. Still, you have nothing against her, and you're sure you can make decent small talk since Jade's here. Your phone dings again, bringing you back to the conversation.

```
GG: i was just saying how i gotta go!! got plans today but its nice to see you so early jane!
GG: Oh, that's okay! See you later.
GA: Goodbye Jade
GG: see you both later!! :D
```

You can nearly feel the atmosphere becoming more tense. You're tempted to close the messaging app, but that would be awfully rude. You try and make small talk, and sleuth for a topic that the two of you might have in common.

GG: So, how are you?
GA: Quite Well
GA: How Are You
GG: I'm quite alright. Up and at 'em a little early today, just like you!
GA: I Cant Tell If Im Up Early Or Late
GA: But I Digress
GG: Ah... I hope you're not too tired at least.
GA: I Am Kept Awake By Caffeine And Spite
GA: Ha Ha
GA: That Is Almost A Joke

Honestly, you're caught off guard a little. You weren't even sure Kanaya made jokes. It's nice to finally talk to her one on one like this though, she seems much nicer than you had previously thought, and you give yourself room to relax, just a touch.

GG: So, anything you particularly enjoy for getting that caffeine?
GA: Oh
GA: Tea Most Often
GA: Although I Am Not Too Picky
GG: Tea is good! I'm more of a coffee fan, but that's mostly because they don't sell instant tea.
GA: Do You Require Tea
GA: It Is Nearly The Opposite Of Instant But Such Is Tea
GG: Oh, no it's okay. Besides, I wouldn't know where to start with that, and I wouldn't want to inconvenience you.
GA: I Could Show You
GA: It Is No Inconvenience Whatsoever
GA: Are You Free Today

The emerald words on your screen bring you wide awake. Maybe you're just finally waking up, you think to yourself, but you know that the offer of going to visit Kanaya is what's giving you this burst of energy and making your heartbeat just a little faster. You sit up, and think to yourself all of the things you'd need to get ready before going. You definitely need to get changed, and you should probably grab some breakfast, and-

Relax. One step at a time, just let her know that you'd love to go over. You can do that.

GG: I'm free whenever, if you'll have me!
GA: Yes I Will
GA: Do You Know Where I Live

GG: More or less!
GA: That Does Not Inspire Confidence
GA: I Will Send You Directions
GA: See You Whenever
GG: See you soon!

Right out of a conversation like this, usually you'd take your time to worry and fuss over everything you need to prepare, but not this time. Kanaya is far too dignified for you to make her wait any longer than absolutely necessary. You use your phone to order an Uber or whatever, before thinking about what you can do to get ready in the few minutes you have. Getting changed is non-negotiable, but you really, don't have time for much more so you rush back to your room and grab an outfit out of your closet for the first time in weeks, your signature red suit. You've worn it maybe three times, ever, but this is KANAYA. Underdressing for the first time you've seen her in years is the last thing you want to do, so you hurriedly throw on your suit and rush out the door.

The car outside your apartment takes you right to Kanaya's place in the centre of the city, a decent distance from your apartment. You don't often take these streets, Jade lives on the outskirts of town and it's not like you're visiting Roxy much at the moment. Before long, you're at a modern-looking door in a newly-built apartment building. You give yourself a second to gather your nerves and make sure your suit is on straight before you knock.

Immediately after opening the door, you remember that nobody knocks on doors anymore, you could have just texted her. You begin to think of ways to explain that, maybe it was a formal thing, with all the business you totally do, but the door silently hinges open before you can come up with anything convincing.

JANE: Ah, um... Hello! :B
KANAYA: Hello

Standing in the doorway, dimly illuminated by a source that doesn't seem to be from inside the apartment is Kanaya. She's wearing baggy pajama pants and a thin plain black shirt, and suddenly you feel like a complete dolt. The thought of overdressing hadn't even been a consideration, but here you are! Alright, alright. It's fine! You're just showing your politeness. Once again, you keep your anxiety under control as Kanaya speaks softly in the doorway.

KANAYA: Would You Like To Come In
KANAYA: Or Would You Prefer My Famous Apartment Hallway Floor Tea
JANE: Of course, after you!

Kanaya turns away and walks into her apartment, flipping a switch and faintly illuminating the room

as she does, and you follow her into the cozy apartment. The living room is dotted with candles, contributing to the dim glow and faint vanilla scent of the room. You continue following her, leading to a small but well-stocked kitchen with various teas set out on the countertop.

KANAYA: So

JANE: So!

KANAYA: Tea

JANE: Tea it is! You have quite the selection here.

KANAYA: It Is Important To Be Well Prepared To Accomodate Guests

JANE: Oh, do you have many people over?

KANAYA: Theoretically

KANAYA: Anyways

KANAYA: What Sort Of Tea Would You Like

KANAYA: We Have All Sorts Of Sweet Varieties If That Is

KANAYA: So To Speak

KANAYA: Your Cup Of Tea

You can't help but laugh, just a little. Kanaya prepares mugs of earl grey for both of you, and sets them down on a small coffee table in front of the couch in the living room. You sit, and she sits beside you.

JANE: I have to say, you've really caught me off guard today.

KANAYA: How So

JANE: Well, I always saw you as more... what's the word.

KANAYA: Unfunny

JANE: No! But I mean, sort of?

JANE: I just expected you to be so serious, I guess.

JANE: And now I'm the one here all dressed up in my stupid suit at nine in the morning.

KANAYA: Your Suit Isnt Stupid

KANAYA: It Fits You Well

JANE: Yeah, maybe it fits my body well, but that's not ME, you know?

KANAYA: Although I May Not Know You Very Well

KANAYA: We Do Have That Experience In Common

KANAYA: The Expectations We Fit Ourselves Into Are Often Restrictive

KANAYA: And Boring

JANE: Exactly!

JANE: I never wanted to be some stupid heiress, and I never wanted to wear this dumb serious suit.

KANAYA: So Take It Off

You nearly choke on your tea before Kanaya can elaborate.

KANAYA: Metaphorically

KANAYA: But Also

KANAYA: I Have An Idea So Take Off Your Jacket

JANE: Huh?

Despite your confusion, you do take off the jacket. You'll gladly take any excuse you can get to be dressing a bit less formally right now. You hand the jacket to Kanaya, who holds it up to the light and inspects it. You know she does some kind of fashion stuff, but it's not like there's much she can do in the middle of her living room?

You are swiftly and gracefully proven wrong. Kanaya holds the jacket by its shoulder, puts another of her clawed hands on a sleeve, and tears it clean off.

JANE: WHAT!

She rips the other crimson sleeve off and places them both on the table, before handing your former jacket back to you.

KANAYA: Here

KANAYA: Put It On

Well, fuck it, basically? You really don't tend to let loose, much less around other people, but it's not like you have much of a choice, and... Kanaya gets it. She's in the same spot, and you were expecting her to be all serious just as much as you were expecting yourself to be. You put on the jacket, and it looks sort of silly. Your white button up shirt's sleeves remain, and it looks like you're wearing some kind of business vest.

KANAYA: Okay

KANAYA: That Wont Do

JANE: I guess not?

KANAYA: Hold Still

What else are you gonna do, really? You hold still as Kanaya puts a clawed hand on your shoulder, gripping you gently. You can feel the points of her claws gently pressing into you, making sure she has a solid grasp as she tears a sleeve off of your button-up. You can't help but look up to her, both physically and metaphorically right now. She seems just so strong, like she knows what she wants and she knows what you want and she's just making shit happen. She's also beautiful but, come on.

You practically just met. Yes, maybe you're sharing an intimate clothes-ripping personal growth moment, but it's in a FRIEND way. You're sure.

She puts the paw on your other shoulder and sleeve, and tears the second sleeve off. She looms above you, and you keep looking up at her in shock and awe. You're pretty sure this isn't standard procedure for clothes mending, but then again, she'd know better than you. Kanaya takes the sleeves, folds them once, and leaves them on the table in front of you, before placing a soft peck on your lips.

JANE: UM...

KANAYA: Oh

KANAYA: Well

KANAYA: Would You Believe Me If I Claimed That Was A Force Of Habit

JANE: Not really, no!

KANAYA: Not Really

KANAYA: Could You Be Persuaded

JANE: Was it THAT bad?

Kanaya laughs.

KANAYA: No

KANAYA: Just Unexpected

JANE: You're the one who did it!

KANAYA: I Know

KANAYA: I Didn't Plan To

JANE: So it was just... a whim?

KANAYA: That Makes It Sound Worse

KANAYA: The Action Was The Whim

KANAYA: The Feeling Was Underlying

JANE: Hoo...

JANE: Feeling? :B

KANAYA: Infatuation To Be Specific

KANAYA: I Can't Claim Anything Too Grand But

KANAYA: You Know

JANE: Oh my.

JANE: I mean.

JANE: Same?

JANE: I think "infatuation" sums it up quite easily.

JANE: You're beautiful! And I've been so...

You sigh. The tea is barely cool enough to sip, and you give it a taste before continuing.

JANE: I had such high expectations of you.

JANE: As a mutual friend, as someone who dresses nicely.

JANE: As a lesbian, even.

JANE: And you didn't match any of them! You're nowhere near the person I thought you were.

JANE: Not even close!

KANAYA: To Be Fair

KANAYA: You Are Also Not The Person I Thought You Were

JANE: I mean yeah, we didn't really know each other too well.

KANAYA: We Still Dont Really

JANE: That's fair.

JANE: But in some ways, you've sort of matched everything I could have hoped for?

JANE: You don't constantly dress all formally like I thought, but you knew how to alter my outfit.

JANE: And you're much funnier than I had thought!

KANAYA: Thank You For That

JANE: Any time.

JANE: Just...

JANE: What am I feeling here?

KANAYA: Is That Rhetorical Or

JANE: Well, you had an idea about my outfit, so...

You sip your tea, looking into it. There's nothing to see, but it's better than facing your fears.

KANAYA: Gay

JANE: The outfit?

KANAYA: No

KANAYA: Well That Too

KANAYA: I Meant Youre Feeling Gay

JANE: I'm feeling...

JANE: Gay.

KANAYA: Thats What It Sounds Like

KANAYA: And I Am Very Well Versed In Gay

KANAYA: But Perhaps That Is Just Wishful Thinking

JANE: I mean.

JANE: I'm not like, in love or anything!

KANAYA: No We Have Just Started Talking

KANAYA: Its Called A Crush

JANE: I know what a crush is!

KANAYA: Yeah

JANE: I have a crush on you?

KANAYA: Do You

You finish your tea and continue to stare into your mug. This conversation's gonna get harder before it gets easier, you think.

JANE: Um.

JANE: We sort of just met, but...

JANE: Probably?

KANAYA: And What Would You Like To Do About It

JANE: Well I didn't think that far ahead!

KANAYA: Well

KANAYA: We Dont Have To Think Ahead

KANAYA: There Is Plenty Of Time To Figure Out Commitments And Such

JANE: Hoo hoo...

JANE: Commitments?

KANAYA: In Theory

KANAYA: But

KANAYA: Right Now We Are Not In Theory

KANAYA: We Are In My Apartment On My Couch

KANAYA: Your Sleeves Have Been Torn Off

KANAYA: And Your Lips Have Been On Mine

KANAYA: What Are You Going To Do About It

JANE: Oh gee.

JANE: UM.

JANE: We could kiss?

KANAYA: You Say That Like Its A Question

KANAYA: And The Answer Is Yes If You Want To

JANE: I MEAN.

JANE: If you're offering.

KANAYA: I Am

And you do. One short, gentle kiss into another. She's softer than you thought, although that's sort of been a theme today. You don't allow yourself to get carried away, pulling back and resting your hand on hers.

JANE: So...

JANE: What exactly are we?

KANAYA: Lesbians On A Couch

KANAYA: A Butch With A Torn Suit
KANAYA: And A Femme Who Really Needs To Grow Her Hair Out Again One Of These Days
KANAYA: Tomorrow Can Be Decided Tomorrow
JANE: Yeah, you're right.
JANE: I didn't know you were femme!
KANAYA: I Didn't Know You Were Butch
KANAYA: I Thought You Were Like
KANAYA: Business Core
JANE: Is that even a thing?
KANAYA: Not Anymore
KANAYA: Its Remains Lay On My Coffee Table
JANE: Well, good riddance. :B

You lean over and rest your head on her shoulder.

JANE: You know, you're really good at getting me to open up.
KANAYA: Nonsense
KANAYA: You Wanted To Open Up
KANAYA: I Was Just In The Right Place At The Right Time
JANE: I don't think that's true.
JANE: I mean, I did want to get out of my shell a little...
JANE: But I wouldn't have been able to if you hadn't invited me over.
JANE: And if you hadn't literally ripped off the role I tried to wear.
KANAYA: Youve Helped Me Open Up Some As Well
KANAYA: I Dont Normally Go Tearing Up The Outfits Of My Peers
KANAYA: Not While Theyre Wearing The Outfits At Least
KANAYA: Nonetheless
KANAYA: I Think We Are Both Quite Nice For Each Other
JANE: I think so too, Kanaya.
JANE: And I look forward to figuring tomorrow out with you.
KANAYA: Its Only Ten In The Morning
KANAYA: Did You Mean The Metaphorical Tomorrow Or
JANE: Hoo hoo, you're right!
JANE: How about we just enjoy today?
JANE: You could teach me how to make tea.
KANAYA: Sounds Like A Plan To Me



Fi

86

ajk 7/2/20



Ash

87



Adam

88



Mage

89



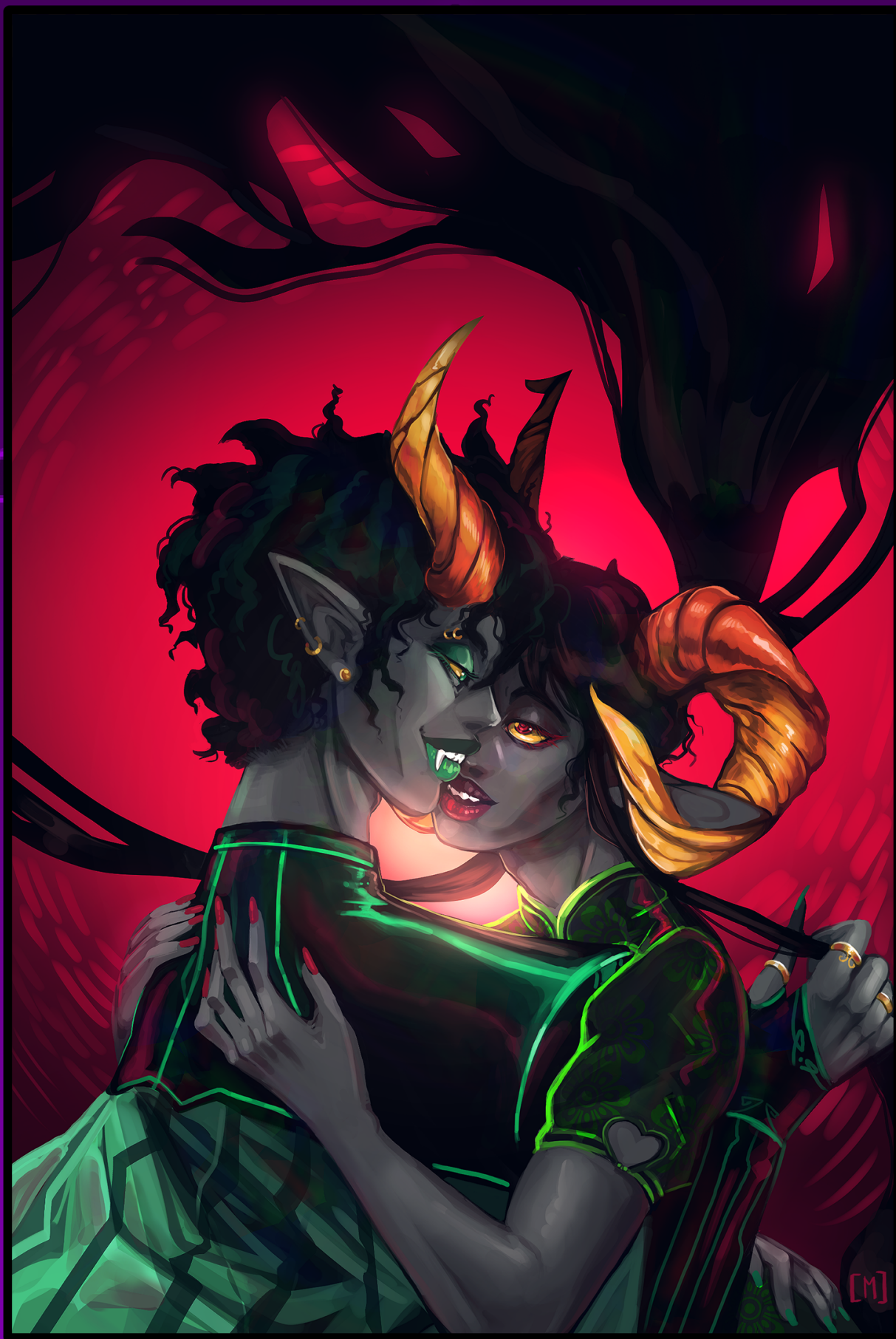
Rubix

90



Wolf

91



Mikky

92

Credits

- 1 AJ
 @duetland
- 2 Reed
 @conksuckGucci
- 3 anneArundel
 @anne_arundel
- 4 Rae
 @kisme
- 5 Lance
 @noconsenttobeanerd
- 6 Mars
 @LA1J3C
- 7 chezforshire
 @chezforshire
- 8 Jesu
 @JesuQueso
- 9- Jojo
13  @FunkMcLovin
- 14 Salt
 @salinesalts

- 15 Hal
 @aesthetic_Doom
- 16 Beat
 @patchpaladin
- 17 springfia
 @Nerdt0pia
- 18 hollyhock
 @theusualbizarre
- 19 Butler
 @butlerkitty_
- 20 Cookie
 @NyabinaryNepeta
- 21 Hannah
 @anemersi
- 22- Eva/Dove
37  @WorstGirlEva
- 38 Jules
 @jules73777300
- 39 Cal
 @poisonedharlequin
- 40 Octo
 @OctoKaotic

- 41 Roxy
 @CG25562
- 42 Wan
 @whileasleep
- 43 Iris (blurry)
 @jadevrisrezi
- 44 Sara
 @cosmignon
- 45- Reva
58  @reva_pocalypse
- 59 Lake
 @grimlakes
- 60 Moth
 @mothrey
- 61 Val and Vivt
 @delphiniumxlove and @fantasy._costco
- 62 Mai
 @antibinyary
- 63 Alea
 @llarfox
- 64- Aaron
70  @no1lemonsnot

71 Fritz
 @Floofy18514414

72 AnxiousAdvent
 @anxiousAdvent

73 Davey
 @imlovedavepeta

74 Michael
 @kaeyaalberich

75 Kitto
 @kittokattxx

76 Met
 @amphibiousdyke

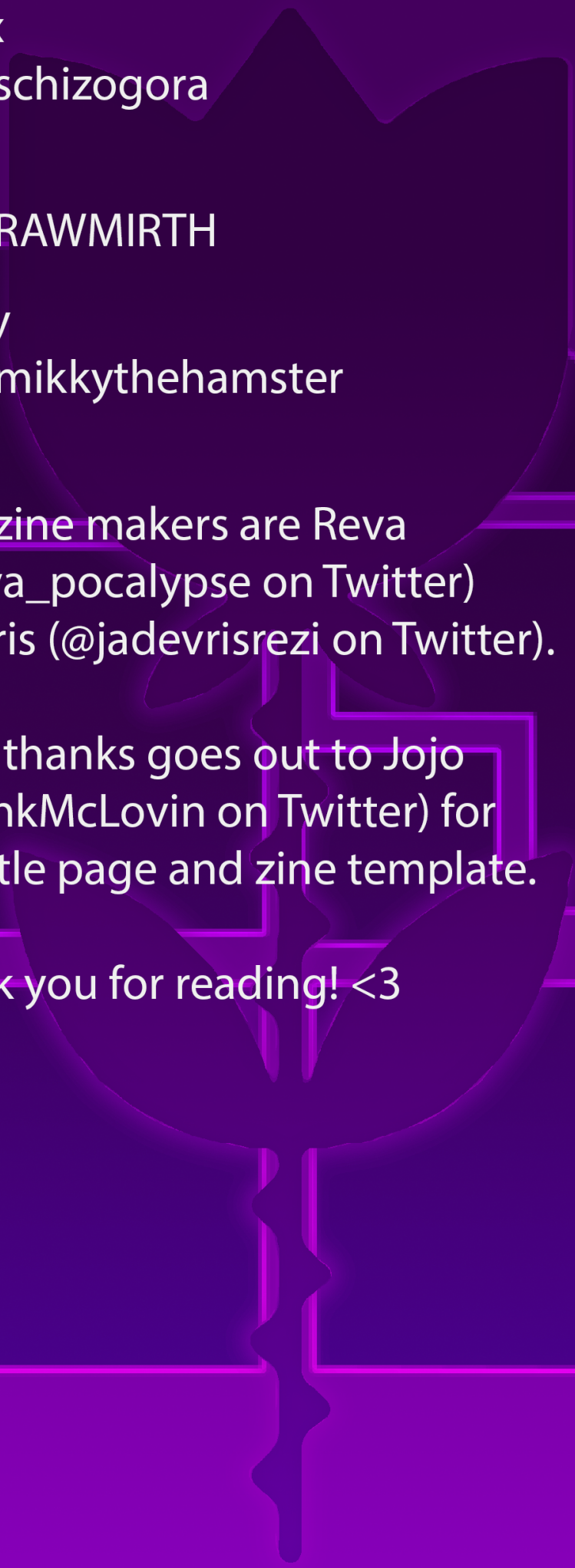
77- ribbitpiano
85  @ribbitpiano

86 Fi
 @dirksimp

87 Ash
 @american-ninja

88 Adam
 @gothshigeo

89 Mage
 @solarmage

- 
- 90 Rubix
🐦 @schizogora
- 91 Wolf
🐦 @RAWMIRTH
- 92 Mikky
🐦 @mikythehamster

Your zine makers are Reva
(@reva_pocalypse on Twitter)
and Iris (@jadevrisrezi on Twitter).

Extra thanks goes out to Jojo
(@FunkMcLovin on Twitter) for
the title page and zine template.

Thank you for reading! <3